

Blues leave their recovery too late

WYCOMBE'S habitual problem of failing to put away their scoring chances when right on top, cost them the game in their pre-season friendly with Cheltenham Town of the Southern League at Loakes Park on Tuesday night.

Wanderers dictated 80 per cent of the play and had the same ratio of scoring chances. But it was Cheltenham who came out on top in this rousing match by virtue of grabbing two goals in rare attacks on the home goal.

As friendlies go this was an excellent match with just the right amount of competitive spirit. Wycombe did not want to lose for the first time to their long standing rivals and reserved their best football for the last half hour, by which time they trailed 0-2.

During this spell they produced attack after attack on the Cheltenham goal but the defence was cracked only once when Steve Long rose to head home from a corner in the 73rd minute. Try as they might Blues just could not force home the equaliser.

Manager Andy Williams brought in Graham Mackenzie and Terry Scott to replace Dave Allanson and Dylan Evans from the side that started Saturday's match against Minehead.

Neither was thoroughly convincing although Scott, as he grew in confidence towards the end of his first 90 minute work out since a cartilage operation, showed a few touches of class.

IMPRESSIVE

Cheltenham came to Loakes Park with an impressive series of friendly results behind them. They lost 2-1 to Hereford, drew 2-2 with Northampton and beat top

Wycombe Wanderers 1, Cheltenham 2 Report by MICHAEL KNOX

non-leaguers Hednesford 3-1. They are a well-organised side who rely on counter attacks to provide their goals.

These tactics certainly worked on Tuesday. In the 29th minute a delightful 40 yard pass threaded through to overlapping right-back John Murphy completely split the home defence. Murphy crossed back to Dave Lewis on the edge of the area. He fed the unmarked John Davies who scored with a slightly mishit shot.

Until then Wycombe had dictated the play. Mackenzie had one shot cleared off the line while Stewart Atkins hit the right hand upright from close range after brushing past a defender. So Blues found themselves 1-0 down at the interval against the run of play.

Atkins, to whom the fans have taken an immediate liking was desperately unlucky just after half-time not to score twice. First he controlled Paul Birdseye's cross on his chest before unleashing a fierce shot and then he shot well on the turn. But both these efforts were stopped by the goalkeeper.

The visitors changed goalkeepers between these two incidents and it was Jeff Miles who saved the latter and had a distinctly busy time in the closing stages.

20 YARD SHOT

But the next 'keeper to be beaten was Peter Spittle who could find no way of stopping a powerful 20 yard left foot shot from Dave Dangerfield, who

found himself with time to shoot from a promising position. The ball skidded off the turf which had been sodden by a tremendous thunder shower in the first half.

The thought of a decisive defeat seemed to inspire Wycombe to greater efforts and the rest of the match belonged to them. Both Atkins and Keith Mead saw headers tipped over following corners. But it was to prove third time lucky. From Mick Holfield's next corner on the right, Long rose majestically to head home.

Atkins continued to pose problems for the tiring Cheltenham defence and only brave goalkeeping by Miles again prevented him from scoring. Neat work by Scott created the opening. Atkins shot rebounded off the keeper on to his own chest and then went wide.

Wycombe realised it was not going to be their night when Miles stopped one Holfield effort with his feet, while the 'keeper also did well to stop a header from Scott. Much of Blues good play in the last quarter stemmed from the form of Howard Kennedy, who seems to have speeded up during the summer recess.

Blues certainly did not have the luck on the night and they will be hoping that fortunes change when the league programme starts tomorrow.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle, P. Birdseye, R. Davies, K. Mead, A. Phillips, G. Mackenzie, S. Atkins, M. Holfield, S. Long, H. Kennedy, T. Scott. Subs (not used): G. Allanson, D. Evans.

CHELTEHAM: N. Barry (sub: J. Miles 53 mins), J. Murphy, D. Edwards, S. Foster, R. Dean, D. Bryant, D. Dangerfield, T. Paterson, D. Lewis. Hehir (sub: G. Slaughter 45 mins), J. Davies.

Referee: W. Cleere (Downley).
Half-time 0-1. Score: Wycombe S. Long (73 mins); Cheltenham Davies (29), Dangerfield (60).

STRONG SIGNS FOR SLOUGH

RICHARD Strong, Wycombe's promising young central defender signed for local rivals Slough Town last week after playing in a 2-2 friendly draw with the touring Malawi side.

Strong joined Wycombe last season from Flackwell Heath and matured rapidly as the winter progressed. He played in a recent pre-season friendly for Wycombe — ironically also against Malawi.

A tall teenager, Strong was keen to play regularly for Wycombe this season, but became concerned after the acquisition of two more experienced central defenders Steve Hardwick from Altrincham and Garry Fowles, formerly of Harrow Borough.

Manager Andy Williams currently has the following 18 players under contract. John Maskell, Peter Spittle, Paul Birdseye, Bobby Davies, Keith Mead, Alan Phillips, Graham Mackenzie, Stewart Atkins, Mick Holfield, Terry Scott, Howard Kennedy, Steve Long, Dave Allanson, Dylan Evans, Derek Harris, John Priestley, Steve Hardwick and Garry Fowles.